

PEOPLE

A new habitat

Portlander sets out on the adventure of a lifetime

BY KRONDA ADAIR



Laura Green surveys Spain's Pyrennees Mountain Range. The Portlander will next steer her bike through Bolivia.

When Laura Green travels to Bolivia this month, she wants to be more than just a tourist. She will combine her love of cycle touring and her desire to give back to communities by biking to different affiliates of Habitat for Humanity in a project she's dubbed Bike N Build.

Habitat for Humanity helps low-income families buy homes through sweat equity—buyers assist the nonprofit in building their own houses. Habitat also organizes Global Village trips in which volunteers travel to a variety of locations and help build houses for residents elsewhere. It's a great way to see a new part of the world and do something useful at the same time.

"I love Habitat," Green says, "and I believe in what it's all about. I want to see what they do in other parts of the world."

The cyclist recently finished a year of work with the Portland chapter through the AmeriCorps program. While inspired by her work, she's arranged this trip on her own with the help of sponsors who donated equipment and with some lessons in bike maintenance from the Community Cycling Center.

Bolivia is just one of more than 70 countries with affiliate chapters. As in many other parts of the world, in recent years migration to major cities in South America has rapidly increased. An influx of families to urban areas has resulted in illegal substandard housing development; it's estimated that more than 500,000 Bolivian families live in overcrowded, unhealthy conditions.

"Just by being here in Portland I can see people who have a home that's safe and clean have improved quality of life," Green says. "I don't think that should be denied to any citizen whether American or Bolivian."

Green will start out as part of a Global Village trip, traveling with other Portland volunteers to spend one week building in the city of Oruro in the western part of the country. "Once I'm there, I want to stay longer and work more with Habitat. That's how the idea of Bike N Build got started. I've always wanted to go to South America, so I thought, 'Here's my chance.'"

Green is no stranger to long-distance cycling. An AIDS ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 1996 got her hooked, followed by a cross-country bike trip with friends in '98. "We did it to connect with other queer communities in the U.S., and we made a video of our experiences."

In 2000, she biked alone throughout Europe, covering 4,500 miles and eight countries in five months. "I was really scared to do it. I didn't know what it was going to be like to be alone as a female."

But her fears were soon allayed. "I didn't really have any problems. It was great. I love bike touring because it's a nonthreatening way to be a tourist. Complete strangers will offer me a bed or a meal because they respect the courage it takes to ride a bike in all types of weather and terrain."

Still, South America isn't known for openness towards gays, and Green doesn't plan to make an issue of her bisexuality. "I don't think being out is something that's realistic or necessary. I think it would bring unnecessary danger."

Some might say the same about traveling alone as a woman. "I've heard that women don't travel alone, but I've investigated other women who have traveled in South America—especially by bike—alone. They do exist. We'll just have to see."

Self-sufficiency is the name of the game. Green will carry almost everything she needs on a used GT mountain bike she

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—Laura Green

bought for \$100 and camp out in a one-person tent. She plans to stay for up to a year and see how things go, possibly continuing the Bike N Build adventure with Habitat affiliates in Ecuador or Brazil. "I feel I can use Habitat to guide me when I'm there to meet people and do something, not just be a tourist and be seen for my dollars—'cause I don't have that many! I'm going learn, and I'm going to work."

Any cash donations Green receives for her trip will go toward costs for the houses she builds. She'll chronicle her adventures via monthly Web site updates and interviews with homeowners.

"Being here—spending a year of my life being a part of these families—I've met and worked with people I normally wouldn't have crossed paths with. It's something that I can give, so why not?" ☐

For updates and information on BIKE N BUILD visit www.wherelaura.com. To make a donation e-mail Laura Green at laura@wherelaura.com.

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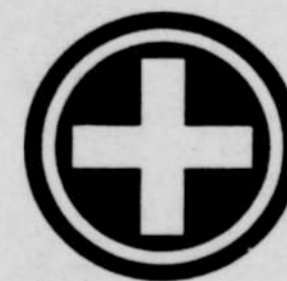


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